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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000521

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [AU](#) [UN](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: STATUS OF UN/AU POLITICAL INITIATIVE

Classified By: DCM R. Powers, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The UN and AU plan to begin negotiations with the non-signatory rebels in late June. Many UN and AU contacts, however, question Special Envoys Eliasson and Salim's commitment to the process and ability to lay the groundwork for successful negotiations. Though Eliasson has secured a renunciation of violent regime change from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the UN is concerned that unilateral USG sanctions could set-back this success. End summary.

Timeline

¶2. (C) Following the visit of UN Special Envoy Jan Eliasson and AU Special Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim to Sudan March 22-27, the UN and AU are working to finalize a timeline for the Darfur political process. According to UN contacts, the UN/AU team will now develop a matrix of the rebel movements' negotiating positions and propose a date and venue to convene talks. Their goal is to commence the negotiating process by the end of June. One UN official said that Salim and Eliasson believe that negotiations will extend to 2008.

UN/AU Commitment Questioned

¶3. (C) Several UN and AU sources in Sudan indicate that neither Eliasson nor Salim intend to commit the time and resources to advance the political process--and neither plan to participate in the negotiations. The Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST), composed of UN and AU personnel and charged with sustaining engagement with the non-signatories in Sudan and Chad, is understaffed. The movements remain fractious and with no clear leadership structure. Many of the non-signatories object to an AU role in the process. For this reason, Salim did not accompany Eliasson to Chad after their recent visit to Sudan.

JEM Opts for Political Solution

¶4. (C) Traveling to Chad on March 28, Eliasson met with Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Khalil Ibrahim and obtained a long-sought commitment from JEM to renounce violent regime change in Khartoum. Internal UN reporting

observed: "JEM demonstrated their preparedness for the political solution. JEM denounced secession as their objective and emphasized political participation in the Government of National Unity for 'self-governance.'" (Note: The UN interpreted self-governance as participation in a federal system with limited autonomy for Darfur. End note.) The JEM Secretariat in Abeche, Chad issued a statement on March 28 asserting that "Darfur's problem is political and has no military solution." The statement also criticized UN Security Council Resolution 1706 and said that a new resolution was needed to achieve peace.

¶5. (C) Eliasson met with Group of 19 leader Khamis Abdullah. While welcoming the UN/AU initiative, Abdullah said that Salim and other AU officials who participated in the Abuja peace talks should not participate. (Note: Abdullah was referring to AU Head of Darfur Peace Implementation and co-chair of the JMST Sam Ibok. End note.) Abdullah underscored the importance of unification of the rebel factions, with the support of Eritrea.

NRF: Basis of Unification

¶6. (C) Both Ibrahim and Abdullah stated that a reconstituted National Redemption Front (NRF) should form the basis of a unified rebel movement, though without the same goals of violent regime change in Khartoum. It is unclear what the relative strength of JEM would be in the NRF. UN reporting, however, indicates that the departure of Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) leader Ahmed Abdulshafie and Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) leader Sharif Harir from Chad to Darfur has weakened the other components of the NRF in favor of JEM.

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Consequences of Sanctions

¶7. (C) UN Director of Political Affairs and Co-Chair of the JMST Abidoun Bashua (strictly protect) told Poloff on March 31 that Eliasson had sent a cable to New York stating his belief that Ibrahim and JEM could be brought into a constructive political process. Eliasson hoped that rumored USG sanctions against Ibrahim would be delayed until he had a chance to &bring him on board.⁸ Bashua explained that the rebel factions were &entrenched, personalized movements⁸ and that excluding a key leader from the international process would limit the ability to find a political solution.

Comment

¶10. (C) The UN/AU lead on the political process limits the emergence of competing international initiatives. If the UN/AU political initiative is to succeed, however, the USG must take immediate steps to strengthen the JMST's capacity for sustained engagement with non-signatories in Chad and Sudan. This engagement is not possible during intermittent high-level visits and with the UN and AU's current staffing constraints. In addition, we should press New York and Addis Ababa to fill the vacancies in key positions--including the UN SRSYG and the AU head of mission--to provide consistent leadership on the political process. End comment.
HUME